9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

played a dominant part, to which the claims of agriculture were subordinated. It was customary for the young folk, and in some cases the whole family, to leave the village as soon as the crops were sown and migrate to summer pastures among the hills. This custom is still widely followed in various mountain areas in Europe, for instance Switzerland and Spain, where it can be shown to be of great antiquity. To it the name " transhumance " is given, but we shall use the term " booleying," from " booley" (milking place), or summer hill dwelling. It is strange that scarcely any attention has been given or any importance attached to this aspect of the Irish past, despite its direct bearing on the social and cultural as well as the economic development of rural Ireland, on language and literature, music and the arts. From rare memories or survivals of the custom—it is still followed on Achill Island—and by analogy with transhumant societies overseas, we can envisage the part played by booleying in ancient Ireland, where its wide occurrence was facilitated by the presence of scattered mountain masses in all parts of the island (Chapter 2). We shall refer to some survivals below. The illustration (Fig. 15) shows a bullock's " horn " which used to be blown not long ago at a farm in the Torr Head district of Co. Antrim, to summon people together. One is tempted to see in this custom a relic of the pastoral heritage. Traditions of hospitality are a common accompaniment of pastoral life: there is no need to stress the reputation of the country people in this connexion, but it is relevant to add that the lavish hospitality for which the landed aristocracy have been famous may well have been derived from Gaelic custom.

Fig. 15.

Wherever it is found, this seasonal nomadism assumes a ritual significance, especially where, as in the old Ireland, cattle are its main concern. Thus the departure of the herds and their attendants in spring is accompanied by festivities and ceremonial; and the return to the homestead in autumn is the occasion for the rejoicings and reunions of Hallowe'en, when the youngsters play seasonal games among themselves and tricks upon their elders. We shall revert to this topic in chapter 17. Here we are concerned rather to describe the life

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Fig. 16. Co. Mayo.

Fig. 17. N. Ireland.

The evening milking was often followed by dancing to the music of an itinerant piper, and there were many diversions for the cattle-tenders through the long summer days. Old tales and songs were kept alive among the hills where many of them had their origin. Spinning and knitting occupied the women, and the youngsters amused themselves by cutting and carving wooden objects and by making toys out of rushes—rattles (Fig. 16), cages for butterflies (Fig. 17), dainty rush baskets for gathering "fruogs" (bilberries) (Fig. 18) and ornamental whips and sticks of bound rushes. Little wicker cages were made for catching birds. Various instruments and whistles for calling together the animals were constructed, and there have been discovered deep in the bogs long horns which curiously resemble those still used by the Carpathian shepherds. I have read that in the Scottish Highlands that ancient ceremonial instrument, the bull-roarer (Fig. 113) played a part in the cattle herding. We shall refer to its survival in Ireland in Chapter 19. As in modern Norway, it might be said that "the time spent in the mountain pastures was the happiest time of the year. Every living creature wanted to go to the mountains."

Although this booleying, like the rundale village system which it accompanied and helps to explain, is now almost entirely a thing of the past, it has left many traces in the customs and traditions of the countryside. Hill pastures, now devoted mostly to sheep-rearing and visited only by the shepherd, are still held in common and reckoned in sums, lumps or collops, the unit of mountain grazing which fixes the relative grazing capacity of different kinds of stock. Thus a cow may be reckoned equal to four yearlings, five goats or sheep or say twenty geese. The decline of seasonal nomadism affected the balance of rural life and work and left a summer surplus of young folk who were free to emigrate or to engage in harvesting whether in the east of Ireland or later in Britain, while frequently the women became vagrants during the summer. In Ulster, where the incoming "planters" were bitterly opposed to the "creaghts," as the transhumants were called, the custom explains the ease with which, throughout

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

517 sea-strand, hurley, horse-racing and games have drawn
526 together large crowds at certain seasons of the year, and in summer there were also boat or curragh races. These have by no means lost their appeal: one may instance the gatherings at Omey Island, Co. Mayo. If bull-baiting, doubtless a relic of ceremonial bull-fights, is now dead, cock-fighting is still secretly indulged in, while the illegal "long bullets,"[1] played with a heavy ball along the roads of Co. Armagh and Co. Cork—a curious distribution, for I have not come across it elsewhere—is still popular, and though Wakefield seems to attribute it to English influence it recalls the skill of the Irish peasantry in stone-throwing. This was, legend tells us, one of the playful habits of the giants of old, and a phrase used of the Aran Islands—" quarrels usually end in stone-throwing "—would not be inapplicable to some Irish cities during the " troubles." In the Claddagh of Galway a favourite amusement, turned at times into its original use as " a mode of warfare," used to be casting stones with slings. " When a man was able to strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot." O'Curry states that it was the custom of the ancient Irish to use a flat circular stone in warfare: it was carried in the hollow of the shield.

526 Games which have kept their seasonal character are still played at Hallowe'en, especially that known as " diving for apples." " Riding and shoeing the wooden mare " is perhaps no longer played, but we must repeat that it is rarely safe to speak of old customs as extinct in rural Ireland. It has more than once been my experience to come across habits and beliefs which were described as dead half a century ago. Certain
534 toys should also find a place in this brief summary: there is,
524 for instance, the " bull-roarer," a thin lath of wood with serrated edges which is swung round on a string so as to

[1] An interesting account of bullet throwing is given by Michael J. Murphy in *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*, 1941, p. 78. Both iron and stone bullets were home-made, and the writer describes how the latter were fashioned in " bullet-holes " resembling the ancient cup-marks mentioned above on p. 164. The game was also played round Dunleer, Co. Louth, fifty years ago, but in the Cork style, that is by overhand " bowling."

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

produce a buzzing noise. The toy is known in Co. Carlow as a "whee-doodle" and in Co. Down, where it seems formerly to have been regarded as a "sacred" thing, as a "boomer." Professor Haddon has described specimens from Co. Antrim and Co. Cork. About the Co. Carlow example in the Dublin Museum Dr. Raftery provides me with the following note. "A boy was whirling it around and an old man who saw him was very angry and told him to take the thing home and burn it, as otherwise he would bring bad luck on the countryside." This was in 1921. I illustrate a "bull-roarer" from Cape Clear, Co. Cork (Fig. 113). Its Irish name is Cláirín Búirthe.

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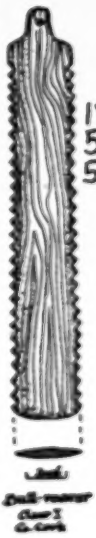

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Fig. 113.

It is, of course, possible that some Irish localities may have learnt the use of this toy from stray specimens brought home from regions where it is still in regular ceremonial use, but when we remember all the other Irish survivals we cannot doubt that the bull-roarer is a relic of the past that has lost, or nearly lost, its sacred character. The bull-roarer has an almost world-wide distribution. It is said to have been employed in ancient Greece in connexion with the Dionysiac mysteries. We can imagine its employment in the initiation rites and magical practices of pagan times so picturesquely reconstructed by Professor Macalister in his book "Ancient Ireland." In various parts of the modern world the bull-roarer is used as a rain charm, in raising a wind or producing thunder, in driving game, herding cattle (*cf.* Chapter 6) or preparing for fishing, in rites of initiation and circumcision, in funeral festivities and mask dances: it is a general rule that the instrument must not be seen by women or children on pain of death. In the words of Haddon: "This insignificant toy is perhaps the most ancient, widely spread and sacred religious symbol in the world."

Of great antiquity and wide distribution, the spear-thrower is another instrument which appears to have survived in Ireland as a toy, used as a throwing stick in boys' games. And another toy "not yet connected with any ceremonial usage" but paralleled among the Chinese and the North

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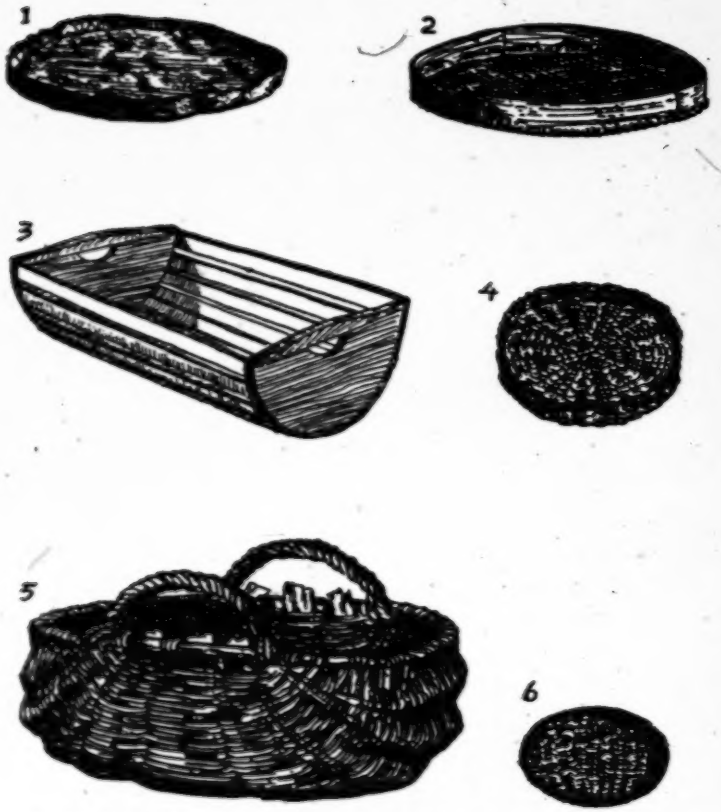

FIG. 71. Skin-tray, split-ash riddle and potato baskets. Approximate scale 1/9 (No. 5, 1/6). (1) Sheep-skin tray or wight. (2) Split-ash riddle. (3) Potato 'basket'. (4) Potato skib. (5) Potato basket. (6) Potato skib. (All Co. Antrim.)

Irish wrenboys

● [534] carried a skin tambourine which they beat when hunting the wren on St. Stephen's Day, and one wonders whether the drummers from whom the Orange performers on King William's Day inherit their wild rhythms were trained on ceremonial wights. (There are also sieves, riddles and shallow baskets of split ash or sally, but these, for example the flat round potato skib—a communal self-service plate—should properly be classed as the work of specialists. 212 (Fig. 71).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

527 825 was pulled out and the bird's life spared: 'In severe winters a robin with a tail was rarely seen.'[1] Another popular Boxing-Day pastime was bull-baiting, though in Kilkenny, where it was officially supported by the town officials and was presumably an English introduction, it was held on the following day, St. John's. In several parts of the country bull-baiting continued well into last century, in Kilkenny down to 1837.[2]

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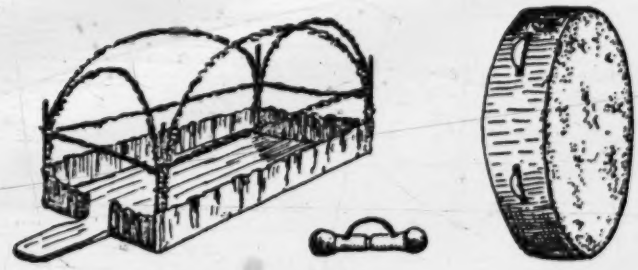

FIG. 87. Hunting the wren. Wren Box for carrying dead wren, and wrenboys' tambourine and stick, Co. Clare. (National Museum, Dublin.)

527 New Year's Day similarly has attracted to itself some of the portents proper to the older year's beginning on 1st November. The prosperity of the individual and the household is felt to depend on the events of New Year's Day. The fairies are active on New Year's Eve and it is well for people to stay indoors that night. First-footing ceremonies appear to be confined to families of recent Scots origin, but the idea behind them is widespread. In parts of Co. Down it is customary for youths to prepare little 'wisps' of straw or dry grass and go from house to house distributing them together with New Year's greetings in the expectation of a gift. In the west on the last night of the year (or alternatively on the eve of Twelfth Night) a large 'Christmas Loaf' specially prepared for the occasion was taken

[1] W. R. Le Fanu, *Seventy Years of Irish Life*, 41.
[2] J. G. R. Prim, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1859), 326.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

add color and give point: to guide, to encourage, to praise, to admonish, to reprove, and to implement the art of "indirection" so dear to the Irish. Many are subtle and cannot be understood unless the history and culture of Inis Beag and Ireland are known to the listener. Such a one is, "Come raise the bag on me." This proverb derives from the days of the famine, when maize (corn) was distributed to the poor and hungry; an old woman on the mainland nearby with eight mouths to feed was given a one pound sack, and she asked an official to help her with the "great load." Now it is employed whenever someone receives less than he anticipated. Both tales and proverbs serve enculturative ends by providing models of proper behavior to infants and children. Riddles, told only by the very young, also function in this manner—to sharpen the wits.

Music, Song, and Dance

Many times I have heard it said on the mainland that the folk of Inis Beag were in the past, and still are, "poor" musicians, singers, and dancers. It is claimed that once there were competent "fiddlers," pipers, tin whistle and flute players, and accordion, concertina, and melodeon players in the island, but during the months that my wife and I lived there, our portable phonograph and two dozen records —along with the accordions of several inexpert musicians, mostly young men trying to master the instrument—provided most of the music for dancing. Music also is produced by lilting, which is known as "mouth music" or "*pus* music" (*pus* being a Gaelic word for mouth). I have witnessed only one man lilt to accompany step dancing, and he for never more than three minutes without pause because of his advanced age; at 73 years, he can lilt while dancing a brief jig himself.

The violin is played holding its base in the crook of the elbow, while the forearm is supported on the thigh of the seated musician. The sole fiddler in 1960 was the *seanchaí*, and he could step dance, sing, and recite poetry as well with a high order of excellence for a man of 72 years. Much more difficult to play than its mouth blown counterpart of Scottish fame, the Irish Uilleann bagpipe is played while seated, and its windbag inflated by a bellow manipulated by movements of the upper arm. Since its drone pipes do not dominate the chanter, or melody pipe, the music produced with this bagpipe is more tuneful than that of the Highland instrument: as one islander put it, "The Scottish pipes make you want to charge into battle, while ours make you want to leap up and dance." Today, the only pipe music heard in Inis Beag is played during the summer, when occasionally a mainland piper is hired to furnish music to dance to for children attending summer language school. Tin whistle players usually perform on the flute also, since the former instrument is a smaller, vertically played cousin of the latter, somewhat resembling the recorder. It is extremely common on the mainland, but no longer played in Inis Beag except infrequently by visitors. Although the accordion and related wind instruments have achieved a new popularity owing to the vogue of the "*céilí* band," in which they assume a commanding position, they were played widely in the island during the last century after being introduced by lighthouse

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

and coast guard personnel. Only four tunes are played by Inis Beag accordionists to accompany dancing.

Instrumentalists, lilters, and singers traditionally performed individually; music was played by a fiddler or flutist and sung by a lilter only to serve solo and figure dancers, and a singer never was joined by others in chorus or accompanied by an instrument. But now the dancers, young and old alike, choose to dance to the lively jigs and reels of the *céilí* band, which plays modern Irish "country dance music." My wife and I discovered that the folk preferred our *céilí* band records for dancing, and were reticent about performing to the music of our many records of fiddling, piping, and flute and tin whistle playing of exceptional quality. On several occasions, we played jazz and classical recordings to groups assembled in our home, to which the islanders listened politely but indifferently. Our *céilí* band records seemed to be quite as acceptable as an accordion at dances and in the pub, and I frequently shared equally with an instrumentalist the time spent in furnishing music for a night long party.

Of the Irish song tradition, Donal O'Sullivan writes: "There is, indeed, a consensus of informed opinion as to its exceeding beauty. . . . In sheer abundance, also, it is probably not surpassed by that of any nation of comparable area and population: for this small and thinly inhabited island has yielded . . . many thousands of melodies of unusual diversity—all of them the anonymous product of the people . . ." (O'Sullivan 1961:5). The Inis Beag folk, as in the case of their music, share but a small portion of this vast body of song. Only a few songs sung publicly by less than a dozen islanders are in Irish, and these are predominantly local compositions. Most of the songs have texts in English and are common to the mainland as well, and of these but a handful are true folk songs—"anonymous product of the people"—rather than broadsides (printed, sold, and memorized) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tunes and songs, just as tale types and motifs, of the Irish often are shared with British and Continental neighbors, and it is hard to know their points of origin and paths of diffusion. Some islanders believe that a few of their songs—such as "The Pretty Maid Milking Her Cow"—were obtained by overhearing the fairies at play. Only one composer is active in the vicinity of Inis Beag at the present time; he is a young man from Inis Thiar who excels at composing songs in Irish based on recent events of importance in and near the two islands. A song of his, which describes the incidents arising out of the grounding of the steamer on a sand bar off Inis Thiar several years ago, is one of the most sung ballads in the region.

Singing is a popular pastime in Inis Beag, particularly among men in the pubs, and several islanders of both sexes have outstanding voices by Irish standards. I tape recorded only 38 songs (13 in Gaelic) and found their major themes to be sentimental, patriotic, and humorous—stressing death, unrequited love, emigration and the parting of relatives and friends, conflict in various forms with the English, and lives of the political "martyrs." Love songs, lullabies, humorous songs, religious songs, laments, drinking songs, and songs of occupation (such as ploughing, milking, and spinning) are the major indigenous Irish folk song categories (O'Sullivan 1961:39), but some are absent and others are underrepresented in Inis Beag. Also absent are carols, as well as boat songs like those of the Gaelic speaking Scottish fishermen.